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25 April 1957

Dear Allen:

The problems that would arise if foreign countries other than the USSR and the UK should acquire capabilities with nuclear weapons can have an important bearing on our international relations in many fields and on the policies we should pursue.

The importance to policy decisions of this so-called "fourth country problem" has been evident in recent discussions we have had with officers of the Department who are involved in US disarmament negotiations and in the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency and NATO. These officers have pointed out that there has never been a coordinated intelligence estimate which establishes the extent of the problem, taking into account the political and economic and other factors involved, and estimates the probable efforts of the development of unconventional capabilities by fourth countries.

These considerations have led us to conclude that there is a real need for an NIE on the fourth country problem. There is attached a list of some of the questions we believe would need to be dealt with in such an estimate. Answers to some of the technical questions might be prepared in a study that would then be associated as a portion of the broader over-all estimate contemplated here. Although preparation of the technical study would presumably involve consideration of Restricted Data, we hope it would be possible to produce it with a classification no higher than Top Secret. In this way, the study can serve effectively in consideration of the political and economic problems involved by the ONE working group.

If, as we hope, you agree with us as to the importance of this problem, we shall be glad to submit our suggestions in further detail for the terms of reference of a National Intelligence Estimate.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ W. Park Armstrong, Jr.

Attachment:

As stated above.

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THE "FOURTH COUNTRY PROBLEM"

PROBLEM:

To Estimate

1. The likelihood of production of nuclear weapons by "Fourth Countries" in the next decade;
2. The probable political and strategic significance of "Fourth Country" production of such weapons.

ASSUMPTION:

No disarmament or nuclear test agreements will be made which would materially alter the present conditions of the problem.

MAJOR ELEMENTS:

I. Capabilities:

Countries which have potential capabilities in technical, industrial and economic fields which would enable them to develop nuclear weapons in the next decade;

- a. without, or
- b. with outside assistance.

This section of the estimate should, where feasible, indicate the possible types, levels and timing of those capabilities, taking into account probable capabilities for delivery.

II. Likelihood:

Estimate the probable policy of each of these countries toward undertaking such programs, based on the balance between motives and

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disincentives, taking into account all pertinent political and economic factors, including the cost of these programs to their economies.

III. Consequences on:

1. Soviet assessments and intentions,
2. likelihood of general war,
3. likelihood of local war,
4. relative power standings,
5. international alignments,
6. disarmament.

NOTE:

While it is suggested that the period to be covered in general be ten years, the estimate should, where useful consider the outlook over a longer term.

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